



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
SIGNED ON HIS BEHALF BY CARDINAL ANGELO SODANO
TO THE ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS
OF THE 24th MEETING FOR FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES
HELD IN RIMINI

To Bishop Mariano De Nicolò of Rimini

Your Excellency, This year too, the Holy Father wishes to send his cordial greetings to you, to the organizers and to all who are taking part in the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples*.¹ The theme chosen for the Meeting in 2003 is a verse from Psalm 34[33]: 12: "What man is there who desires life, and covets days, that he may enjoy good?". This question calls for thought. Man passes long periods of his life almost unaware of the call to true happiness, which nevertheless dwells in his conscience; he is, as it were, "distracted" by multifarious contacts with reality, and it seems that his inner ear is no longer receptive. Isaiah's words spring to mind: "*There is no one that calls upon your name, that bestirs up himself to take hold of you; for you have hid your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquities*" (Is 64: 7). The prophet brings into the limelight the root of the suffering caused by the question the Psalm asks and continues: "*I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me: I said, 'Here am I, here am I', to a nation that did not call on my name*" (Is 65: 1). These words of the Prophet Isaiah are perhaps the best counterpoint to the theme of the Meeting: God shows he is alive, he shakes man who has withdrawn into himself and is confused by his own wickedness, God makes himself present, time and again, seeking to catch man's attention. God's persistence, which shows itself lovingly to a child whose life is adrift, is a moving mystery of mercy and gratuitousness.² The world that humanity has constructed, especially in the most recent centuries, often tends to blur people's natural desire for happiness, increasing the "distraction" into which they risk falling through their intrinsic weakness. Contemporary society gives priority to the kind of desire that can be controlled in accordance with psychological and sociological laws; therefore, it is frequently exploited for profit or for the manipulation of opinion. A series of desires has replaced the yearning that God instilled in human persons to spur them onwards, so that they might seek him and in him alone find fulfilment and peace. Wishful inclinations, directed by powerful means that can influence consciences, become centrifugal forces that push the human being further and further away from himself, making him dissatisfied and sometimes even violent. The 2003 Meeting in Rimini proposes anew a theme that is ever timely: the human creature, who is motivated by this desire for infinite fulfilment, can never be reduced to a means for achieving any kind of personal interest. The imprint of the divine, which here takes the form of a yearning for happiness, means that the very nature of the human being prohibits exploitation.³ The uneasiness, therefore, aroused by the question in Psalm 34[33] stems from the fact that man often does not muster the strength to say: "I am a man who wants life and happy

days!". The theme of the Meeting demands a reaction: people must regain the energy and courage to stand before God to say in answer to the Lord's "Here am I, here am I" - albeit, faintly echoing it - "I am here, too. I entreat you, now that you have found me again". This response to God, who shouts until he penetrates our deafness, describes the awareness, full of feeling, which the person achieves in his innermost depths. This happens the very moment that God's call succeeds in dispelling the clouds wrapped around one's conscience. This response alone: "Here I am", restores to man his true face and marks the beginning of his redemption. However, the person must be supported by an appropriate education that tends, as an end in itself, to encourage the reawakening within him of a consciousness of his own end, and stirs in his heart the energies he needs to achieve it. Education, therefore, is never addressed to the masses, but to the individual with his or her own unique and unrepeatable features. This implies a sincere love for human freedom and a tireless commitment to the defence of human beings.⁴ With this year's theme, the Meeting also reminds the peoples of Europe, who seem to be vacillating under the burden of their history, where their roots are. By repeating the question of the Psalm, this Rimini event vividly calls to mind the great figure of St Benedict in the act of receiving those who asked to enter the monastery (cf. Rule, Prologue, 15). In addition to being a journey of Christian perfection, Benedict's Rule has proven to be an unparalleled means of civilization, unity and freedom. For centuries, often marked by confusion and violence, it enabled ramparts to be built, thanks to which men and women of different times in history were led back to the complete awareness of their dignity. The future should be built by returning to the origins of Europe, treasuring its past experiences, most of which were marked by the encounter with Christ. His Holiness hopes that the Meeting will be an opportunity for true cultural and spiritual growth, assures you of his prayers and cordially imparts a special Apostolic Blessing to all who are taking part in the various events on the programme. I too offer you my best wishes that this noble initiative will be a great success, and very gladly confirm, together with my high esteem, that I remain yours devotedly in the Lord.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano

Secretary of State